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SUBJECT: DAILY SUMMARY OF JAPANESE PRESS 03/28/08

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ARTICLES:

(1) Two female victims of U.S. soldier-caused stabbing incident in Yokosuka still suffer damage physically and mentally

TOKYO SHIMBUN (Page 11) (Full)
Eve., March 26, 2008

Takuya Kishimoto

It was painful to see several scars still left on her right hand. "Even now I see him in a dream," a 27-year-old woman said. She still has a clear memory of her dreadful experience. On July 5, 2007, she and her 17-year-old female friend were stabbed randomly by a

20-year-old man, who was 19 at the time, with a steak knife in an apartment in Yokosuka City, Kanagawa Prefecture. The two women narrowly escaped death, but they have suffered a number of difficulties since then because he was a U.S. serviceman.

The woman happened to be in that apartment room rented by another U.S. serviceman, who was a friend of the girl. The girl was a frequent visitor to that room. The woman, just before graduating from a hair styling and make-up college, which she was attending while working, was involved in the incident. She happened to drop in at the apartment in preparation for her graduation work that needed the girl as a model.

The assailant was a seaman recruit, whom the girl had met before. He dropped in at the apartment but he was told by the girl to go home. Losing his temper over her remark, he attacked the girl and the woman.

The woman was stabbed all over her body and at one point lingered on the verge of death. With a division of a tendon found on her right hand, she underwent an operation and rehabilitation. This forced her to quit her job as a receptionist at a hotel.

Her medical expenses amounted to some one million yen, which she paid by herself. It was her dream to be a hair stylist since she was a teenager. She planned to study hair styling in the United States, but she had to spend the money she had saved for that purpose to pay the medical costs.

The woman filed an application for loans from the government's financing system, which is available to victims of crimes committed by U.S. military personnel. Three months later, however, she has yet

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to receive any money. She initially planned to go to the U.S. to study hair styling, but she gave up on the plan. Her dream is unlikely to come true.

Practically, it is difficult to file a claim for compensation against the U.S. serviceman lacking the ability to pay. In the case of using a compensation system provided by the government, it takes her several years to simply go through the proceedings because screening involves the United States. She consulted with a lawyer about the matter, but she was unable to find anyone who is well versed on procedures in the U.S.

She also suffers psychological damage. After the incident, she heard someone without paying any attention to her feelings saying, "It's wrong to be with the U.S. serviceman." She said that at the thought that women, only because of being women, "tend to be misunderstood, "I cannot tell anyone about the damage I am suffering." In recent years, groups in support of victims of crimes committed by U.S. military personnel have emerged, but she is hesitant to ask such an organization for help because of the pain she would suffer when she has to explain every aspect of her damage.

She thought she might be able to express her feelings in a blog on the Internet and wrote the incident she was involved in. In a little while, she received an e-mail of encouragement from her friend as well as an e-mail from a similar victim of a crime committed by U.S. military personnel. The victim was a 20-year-old woman who was gang-raped by four U.S. servicemen assigned to Marine Corps Air Station Iwakuni (in Yamaguchi Prefecture). She realized through exchanges of e-mails with that Yamaguchi woman that she, too, has terribly suffered like her.

There seems to be no end to crimes committed by U.S. soldiers in towns hosting U.S. bases like those in Okinawa and Kanagawa. Given belated financial assistance, such as medical expenses, lack of consultation service, prejudiced views..., the support system for victims provided by the government is insufficient.

The woman said: "As long as U.S. bases exist, incidents caused by their members would unavoidably occur. If the government allows the bases to exist in Japan, I think the government should at least have a system to take care of the victims of incidents."

The assailant seaman recruit was arrested on the spot on charge of attempted murder. As a result of juvenile trial, he was later sent to prosecutors. His first trial is set to take place at the Yokohama District Court's Yokosuka Branch on the afternoon of March 27.

(2) Wall of the Japan-U.S. Status of Forces Agreement impedes investigation of slaying of cab driver

SHUKAN SHINCHO (Page 42) (Full)
April 3, 2008

There exists a major obstacle impeding progress in the investigation into a brutal crime. The crime occurred on a residential street close to Keikyu Shioiri Station in Yokosuka City, Kanagawa Prefecture. On the night of March 19, screams rang out on the narrow street, as if to drown out the sound of the pouring rain. "I heard someone scream out three times," said a housewife living near the scene. She continued: "Surprised, I went out, and there was a taxi at the side of the road with its engine running. The meter on the

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passenger side read "payment," but there was no visible in the driver's seat. When I peered into the vehicle, the driver was slumped over on the passenger side."

The window on the driver's side was open, as if he were making a desperate effort for help. Another local resident noted: "Even though the lamp was on in the cab, I could not see any signs of bloodstains inside. Because it was raining so hard at the time, no one seems to have seen the killer."

The victim was Mr. Masaaki Takahashi (61), a taxi driver from Shinagawa Ward. He had been stabbed in back of the neck on the left side by a thrust of a 20 centimeter kitchen knife. A source connected to the investigation said: "He had died from loss of blood by the time the ambulance arrived. The wound was so deep, it penetrated the lungs. It was plunged in to the end of the blade. Since there was a protective acrylic panel behind the driver, it was avoided apparently by thrusting the knife at the driver from the left side."

The investigation would seem to be difficult due to the lack of eyewitness testimony, but there was left behind in haste something that is clearly an important clue. The source said: "We discovered a credit card on the floor near the driver's seat. The name on it was a crewmember of the USS Cowpens, an Aegis ship belonging to the U.S. Navy."

The scene of the crime was about a one-kilometer distance from the U.S. Navy base. The seaman was a Nigerian (22), who had been missing from the base since March 8. He was declared a deserter on March 10. Considering the circumstances, there was a high probability of learning the details about this murder. A reporter attached to city desk said: "Information came in early on the 22nd, three days after the incident, that the U.S. Navy Criminal Investigation Center (NCIS) had taken the sailor into custody near Gotanda Station. After that, the situation quickly changed."

"I lost my card"

Under the Japan-U.S. Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA), in case a U.S. serviceman suspected of a crime is in the custody of the U.S. forces, even if the Japanese police has an arrest warrant, until the suspect is indicted, that person could be kept in custody at the base. Takeshi Tsuchimoto, a professor at Hakuo University Law School stated: "Under military law, desertion is a very serious crime. One cannot say that it is a violation of the law for the military with investigative authority to have brought the sailor back to the base."

On the other hand, based on the 1995 agreement to improve the SOFA operation, for heinous crimes, the handing over of the suspect can be done prior to indictment. However, unless the charges are firmed up, it would no doubt be difficult to hand the individual over to the Japanese police. Although the prefectural police have continued

to investigate the things left in the cab, a source connected to the investigation revealed: "No fingerprints could be taken from the knife used in the killing or from the credit card, so it was conceivable that gloves were worn. In addition, the sailor says he lost his credit card and denies any involvement. Without anything to back up his being in the vehicle, even if he is indicted, it would not stand up in court."

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On the other hand, the U.S. forces have been unusually cooperative in its response with Navy Commander Adm. Kelly stating to the press that if there were a request, the Navy would respond to voluntary questioning.

A reporter from the city desk said: "Next year in August, the nuclear-powered aircraft carrier George Washington is scheduled to be deployed to the Yokosuka base. There is concern that a negative reaction to it will spring up in Japan due to this incident."

Although the prefectural police's investigative unit asked for investigative cooperation on the 23rd, one has to say that there is a high hurdle to the resolution of this case. Professor Tsuchimoto noted: "With each country investigating different cases, the two investigations have complicated the matter." He went on: "However, considering the seriousness of the case, the U.S. forces should cooperate with the murder investigation. Even if investigators are sent into the base, they can only go so far in questioning the individual. There needs to be carried out a handing over of the individual as quickly as possible."

Although a Japanese person has been murdered in our own country, the investigation is being obstructed. Shouldn't there be a way to overcome this impossible situation.

(3) Prime Minister Fukuda proposes integrating road tax revenues to general account; no future in his policy switch; DPJ compiles "three principles"

MAINICHI (Page 3) (Full)
March 28, 2008

With the expiration of the provisional tax rates, including the gasoline tax, on March 31 in mind, Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda yesterday pledged to integrate the special account from road-related taxes into the general account budget starting in fiscal 2009. Loosing his patience with the deadlock in deliberations between the ruling and opposition camps, Fukuda made a historic policy switch by using a press conference to make the announcement. However since there still remain gaps between his view and that of the main opposition Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ or Minshuto), it can be said that there is no future in his decision. With an eye on a future battle with the government and ruling parties after gasoline prices drop, the DPJ is now alert to Fukuda's policy change, thinking that he launched the effort in order to gain support from the public.

At a press conference yesterday, Fukuda underscored his view of aiming to avoid the expiration of the provisional rates, saying: "It is easy to run away for the reason that there is little time left. But I will never give up."

In regard to a bill amending the Special Taxation Measures Law aimed at retaining the current provisional tax rates, the government and ruling coalition have been coordinating to minimize the gap in the provisional taxes for just about one month by enacting the legislation in late April when the Lower House can take a second vote once the tax reform bill expires in the Upper House at the end of March. However, the outlook is that the public will react sharply toward a revision of the special revision law that would lead to a hike in the reduced gasoline prices.

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Therefore, Fukuda appears to have decided to show the public his "fragile compromise" prior to his announcement of a policy to readopt the legislation (in the Lower House). The reason is that he predicted that even if confusion was created, criticism will go also to the DPJ.

Meanwhile, being alarmed by Fukuda's such moves, the largest opposition party yesterday revealed a set of three principles from President Ichiro Ozawa, who has advocated scrapping the provisional tax rates. An easygoing compromise with the ruling bloc will prove fatal to the DPJ, which aims at the toppling of the Fukuda administration. If the party continues boycotting deliberations, it may be criticized by the public. Deputy President Naoto Kan said: "It is a great progress and I highly value" (Fukuda's decision) to allow revenues from road-related taxes to be freed up for purposes. But he emphasized: "Integrating the special account from road-related taxes into the general account and scrapping the provisional tax rates are inseparable." Some in the LDP are reacting coolly toward Fukuda's top-down approach of directly appealing to the public, which former Prime Minister Junichiro often took. Fukuda said: "I told party members (about my decision). (My decision) is understood by most of them." But a senior LDP member commented: "I heard about it from the prime minister in advance. But I did not give my approval." He indicated in his remark that Fukuda had failed to complete the groundwork in his party. Fukuda met on the night of March 26 with Koizumi and former Secretary General Hidenao Nakagawa, who have taken a flexible stance toward revision talks with the opposition camp. If Fukuda fails to reach an agreement with the DPJ, he will push ahead with his plan to shift tax revenues for road projects to the general account. Given that, the prime minister's decision might create a dispute within the LDP.

(4) Prime minister's surprise road-revenue proposal causes stir in LDP

YOMIURI (Page 4) (Abridged)
March 28, 2008

Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda announced yesterday a set of new proposals centering on a plan to incorporate the road-related tax revenues into the general account starting in fiscal 2009 by abolishing the road-use revenue system. His announcement that the government and ruling coalition would implement the plan without consent of the major opposition Democratic Party of Japan has created a sensation in the Liberal Democratic Party. Some have reacted positively, saying that the outstanding issue since the Koizumi administration would finally move forward, while some others insisted that an agreement with the DPJ is a precondition for implementing the proposals. The prime minister's plan is likely to continue stirring up controversy.

An hour and a half before the prime minister held the press conference yesterday afternoon, some 30 junior LDP members, including House of Representatives member Masaaki Taira, held a meeting with Fukuda at his official residence. In the session, the group presented a set of proposals calling for such steps as allocating the highway tax revenues for general expenditures starting in fiscal 2009 and shortening the 10-year midterm road improvement program to a five-year plan.

The group's proposals that were similar to Fukuda's pleased the prime minister immensely.

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Meanwhile, a Machimura faction member, who has supported the reform policy line advocated by former Prime Minister Abe and his predecessor Koizumi, noted yesterday: "In order to boost his public support, Prime Minister Fukuda must implement reforms regardless of a backlash within the party." A junior member advocating the general account approach also commented, "If the prime minister had not made bold proposals, I intended to revolt against the party decision during a second Lower House vote."

LDP Election Strategy Council Chairman Makoto Koga, the "don" of the road policy clique in the LDP, also told reporters: "The proposals

were so audacious that I was really surprised. The prime minister has vowed to protect local fiscal resources. Can he still deliver on his promise after placing the road-use revenues into the general account?" Highway Research Commission Chairman Yuji Yamamoto indicated that an agreement with the DPJ would be a prerequisite for the Fukuda proposals, noting, "Without the DPJ's consent, the proposals would go down the drain." An influential road policy specialist commented, "Reaching an accord with the DPJ is not possible. Revision talks are over now," apparently with little respect for the prime minister's new policy course.

The proposals also drew fire from a lawmaker from a local district, complaining: "The prime minister's proposals have not undergone any party procedures. I have repeatedly told people in my home constituency that the road revenues are essential for building and repairing roads. Is he going to force me to throw what I promised into the wastebasket?" Local heads also expressed concerns, with Miyazaki Governor Hideo Higashikokubaru saying, "The trend of incorporating the road-use revenues into the general account seems unavoidable. We would like to know exactly how the central government is going to allocate revenues to local regions."

SCHIEFFER